A Characterization of Tridiagonal Matrices*

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to prove that symmetric irreducible tridiagonal matrices and their permutations are the only symmetric matrices (of order $n \geqslant 2$) the rank of which cannot be diminished to less than $n - 1$ by any change of diagonal elements.

The main part of the proof was obtained as a byproduct of a minimum problem solution (cf. [1]).

1. NOTATION AND CONVENTIONS

All vectors and matrices considered are real. The transpose of a matrix M is denoted by M^T, the identity matrix by I. The term vector always means column vector. The scalar product of vectors x and y is denoted by (x, y). If x is a vector, we shall denote by $\|x\|$ the Euclidean norm of x, i.e., $(x, x)^{1/2}$. As is well known, the corresponding operator norm of a square matrix A defined by

$$\|A\| = \operatorname*{lub}_{\|x\| \leqslant 1} \|Ax\|$$

is equal to the square root of the maximum eigenvalue of AA^T. Especially, if A is symmetric, i.e., $A = A^T$, $\|A\|$ is equal to $\max_i |\lambda_i|$ where λ_i are the eigenvalues of A. For remaining usual definitions we refer to the book [2].

For our purpose it will be convenient to denote by C_n ($n \geqslant 2$ integer) the class of all symmetric matrices A of order n such that for any diagonal matrix D the rank of $A + D$ is greater than or equal to $n - 1$.

* Dedicated to Professor A. M. Ostrowski on his 75th birthday.

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2. In this section, we are going to prove the main theorem (2.8). First, let us state three obvious lemmas.

LEMMA 2.1. *If $A \in C_n$ and D is diagonal then $A + D \in C_n$.*

LEMMA 2.2. *If $A \in C_n$ then all eigenvalues of A are simple.*

LEMMA 2.3. *If $A \in C_n$ then A is irreducible.*

The following lemma will be of main importance.

LEMMA 2.4. *If $A \in C_n$ then there exists a permutation matrix P such that PAP^T has the (nontrivially partitioned) form*

$$\begin{pmatrix} D_1 & B_{12} \\ B_{12}^T & D_2 \end{pmatrix}$$

where D_1, D_2 are diagonal matrices.

Proof. If $n = 2$, the assertion is true. Let now n be greater than two and let $A \in C_n$. It is easy to see that there exists a diagonal matrix D_0 such that

$$\|A + D_0\| \leqslant \|A + D\| \tag{1}$$

for all diagonal matrices D. Denote $A_0 = A + D_0$. Let λ_0 be the maximum, μ_0 the minimum eigenvalue of A_0. From (1), it follows immediately that

$$\lambda_0 > 0 \tag{2}$$

and

$$\mu_0 = -\lambda_0. \tag{3}$$

The set of all matrices $P = (p_{ik})$ with the same off-diagonal elements as A forms an n-parametric system $\mathscr{P}$ depending on the diagonal elements p_{ii}. With each $P \in \mathscr{P}$ we can associate its maximum eigenvalue $\lambda(P)$ and minimum eigenvalue $\mu(P)$. According to (1), (2), and (3), we have

$$\max_{P \in \mathscr{P}}(\lambda(P) - \mu(P)) = \lambda_0 - \mu_0. \tag{4}$$

By 2.2, λ_0 and μ_0 are simple eigenvalues of A_0. Hence $\lambda(P) - \mu(P)$ is an analytic function of the diagonal elements p_{ii} in the neighborhood of A_0, i.e.,

$$\left[\frac{\partial(\lambda(P) - \mu(P))}{\partial p_{ii}}\right]_{P=A_0} = 0, \qquad i = 1, \ldots, n. \tag{5}$$

To compute these derivatives, denote $\lambda = \lambda(P)$, x the corresponding eigenvector:

$$Px = \lambda x, \qquad \|x\| = 1, \tag{6}$$

and denote by $\dot{}$ the differentiation $\partial/\partial p_{ii}$.

From (6), we get

$$\dot{P}x + P\dot{x} = \dot{\lambda}x + \lambda\dot{x}$$

so that

$$(\dot{P}x, x) + (P\dot{x}, x) = \dot{\lambda}(x, x) + \lambda(\dot{x}, x).$$

Since

$$(P\dot{x}, x) = (Px, \dot{x}) = \lambda(x, \dot{x}),$$

it follows that

$$\dot{\lambda} = (\dot{P}x, x). \tag{7}$$

Let $y = (y_k)$ and $z = (z_k)$ be normed eigenvectors of A_0 corresponding to λ_0 and μ_0:

$$A_0 y = \lambda_0 y, \qquad \|y\| = 1,$$

$$A_0 z = \mu_0 z, \qquad \|z\| = 1.$$

It follows from (7) that

$$\left[\frac{\partial\lambda(P)}{\partial p_{ii}}\right]_{P=A_0} = y_i^2$$

so that the condition (5) yields

$$y_i^2 = z_i^2, \qquad i = 1, \ldots, n. \tag{8}$$

If $N = \{1, 2, \ldots, n\}$, denote by M that subset of N consisting of all indices i for which

$$y_i = z_i;$$

it follows from (8) that if $j \in N - M$ then

$$y_j = - z_j \neq 0.$$

Since $z \neq y \neq - z$, $\emptyset \neq M \neq N$ and $y + z \neq 0$, $y - z \neq 0$.

Let m be the number of elements in M and let P be a permutation which transforms M into the set of the first m indices of N. Then, the matrix

$$B = PA_0P^T$$

has the property that for $Py = \tilde{y}$, $Pz = \tilde{z}$

$$\begin{aligned} B(\tilde{y} - \tilde{z}) &= PA_0(y - z) = P\lambda_0(y + z) \\ &= \lambda_0(\tilde{y} + \tilde{z}), \\ B(\tilde{y} + \tilde{z}) &= \lambda_0(\tilde{y} - \tilde{z}) \end{aligned}$$

according to (3). However, in the partitioned form

$$\tilde{y} + \tilde{z} = \begin{pmatrix} u \\ 0 \end{pmatrix}, \qquad \tilde{y} - \tilde{z} = \begin{pmatrix} 0 \\ v \end{pmatrix}$$

where $u \neq 0$, $v \neq 0$.

Let

$$\begin{pmatrix} B_{11} & B_{12} \\ B_{12}^T & B_{22} \end{pmatrix}$$

be the corresponding partitioning of B.

Hence

$$\begin{aligned} B_{11}u &= 0, \\ B_{12}^Tu &= \lambda_0 v, \\ B_{12}v &= \lambda_0 u, \\ B_{22}v &= 0. \end{aligned} \tag{9}$$

We are now able to prove that B_{11} as well as B_{22} are zero matrices. Assume $B_{11} \neq 0$ and denote for $\sigma > 0$ by $B(\sigma)$ the matrix

$$B(\sigma) = \begin{pmatrix} \sigma^{-1}B_{11} & B_{12} \\ B_{12}^T & \sigma B_{22} \end{pmatrix}.$$

By (9), the vectors $\tilde{y}$ and $\tilde{z}$ are eigenvectors of $B(\sigma)$ with eigenvalues λ_0 and $-\lambda_0$. The remaining eigenvalues depend continuously on σ. If σ tends to zero, $B(\sigma)$ has arbitrarily large elements and since $B(\sigma)$ is symmetric, some eigenvalue has arbitrarily large modulus. On the other hand, the remaining eigenvalues of $B(1)$ are contained in the interval $(-\lambda_0, \lambda_0)$. Consequently, λ_0 or $-\lambda_0$ is a multiple eigenvalue of $B(\sigma_0)$ for some $\sigma_0 > 0$. This implies that for $\varepsilon = 1$ or $\varepsilon = -1$ the matrix

$$\begin{pmatrix} \sigma_0{}^{-1}B_{11} - \varepsilon\lambda_0 I_1 & B_{12} \\ B_{12}^T & \sigma_0 B_{22} - \varepsilon\lambda_0 I_2 \end{pmatrix}$$

has rank smaller than $n - 1$ so that

$$P^T \begin{pmatrix} B_{11} - \sigma_0\varepsilon\lambda_0 I_1 & B_{12} \\ B_{12}^T & B_{22} - \sigma_0{}^{-1}\varepsilon\lambda_0 I_2 \end{pmatrix} P$$

with the same off-diagonal elements as A has rank smaller than $n - 1$. This contradiction proves $B_{11} = 0$. Similarly, $B_{22} = 0$. Hence, PAP^T has the form as asserted.

Remark 2.5. The assertion of Lemma 2.4 can be also formulated as follows. If $A \in C_n$ then there exists a subset M of $N = \{1, 2, \ldots, n\}$, $\emptyset \neq M \neq N$, such that $a_{ik} = 0$ whenever $i \neq k$ and both i and k belong either to M or to $N - M$. This property is also called property A due to Young [3].

LEMMA 2.6. *If $A \in C_n$ then no row of A contains more than two off-diagonal elements different from zero.*

Proof. Let $A \in C_n$ be already in the form

$$\begin{pmatrix} D_1 & B_{12} \\ B_{12}^T & D_2 \end{pmatrix}$$

and assume that the matrix $B_{12} = (a_{ip})$, $i \in M = \{1, 2, \ldots, m\}$, $p \in N - M = \{m+1, \ldots, n\}$ has three entries in the first row a_{1j}, a_{1k}, a_{1l} different from zero.

If D_1 is nonsingular, we can write

$$\begin{pmatrix} D_1 & B_{12} \\ B_{12}^T & D_2 \end{pmatrix} = \begin{pmatrix} I_1 & 0 \\ P_{21} & I_2 \end{pmatrix} \begin{pmatrix} D_1 & B_{12} \\ 0 & Q_2 \end{pmatrix}$$

where $P_{21} = B_{12}^T D_1^{-1}$, $Q_2 = D_2 - B_{12}^T D_1^{-1} B_{12}$.

It follows that for any nonsingular diagonal D_1 the matrices $D_2 - B_{12}^T D_1^{-1} B_{12}$ as well as $B_{12}^T D_1^{-1} B_{12}$ belong to C_{n-m} since otherwise the rank of A could be diminished to less than $n - 1$ by a proper change of diagonal elements. Now, it is possible to choose a nonsingular $D_1 = \operatorname{diag}\{d_i\}$, $i \in M$, in such a manner that the following entries of $B_{12}^T D_1^{-1} B_{12}$ will be different from zero:

$$\sum_{i \in M} a_{ji} a_{ki} d_i^{-1} \neq 0, \qquad \sum_{i \in M} a_{ji} a_{li} d_i^{-1} \neq 0, \qquad \sum_{i \in M} a_{ki} a_{li} d_i^{-1} \neq 0.$$

Since $B_{12}^T D_1^{-1} B_{12} \in C_{n-m}$, there exists by 2.5 a decomposition of $N - M$ into two subsets S_1, S_2, and any two of the indices j, k, l have to belong to different subsets. Since this is impossible, the proof is complete.

LEMMA 2.7. *Let $a_1, \ldots, a_n$ $(n \geqslant 3)$ be all different from zero. Then the matrix*

$$A = \begin{pmatrix} 0 & a_1 & 0 & \ldots & 0 & a_n \\ a_1 & 0 & a_2 & \ldots & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & a_2 & 0 & \ldots & 0 & 0 \\ \cdots & \cdots & \cdots & \cdots & \cdots & \cdots \\ 0 & 0 & 0 & \ldots & 0 & a_{n-1} \\ a_n & 0 & 0 & \ldots & a_{n-1} & 0 \end{pmatrix}$$

does not belong to C_n.

Proof. There exist numbers $y_1, \ldots, y_n$ all different from zero such that

$$\sum_{i=1}^{n-1} (a_i y_i y_{i+1})^{-1} + (a_n y_n y_1)^{-1} = 0.$$

Hence there exist numbers $z_1, \ldots, z_n$ all different from zero such that

$$z_i y_i^{-1} - z_{i+1} y_{i+1}^{-1} = (a_i y_i y_{i+1})^{-1}, \qquad i = 1, \ldots, n-1,$$

$$z_n y_n^{-1} - z_1 y_1^{-1} = (a_n y_n y_1)^{-1}.$$

Define the numbers $d_1, \ldots, d_n$ by

$$\begin{aligned} a_1 y_2 + a_n y_n &= d_1 y_1, \\ a_2 y_3 + a_1 y_1 &= d_2 y_2, \\ &\cdots\cdots \\ a_n y_1 + a_{n-1} y_{n-1} &= d_n y_n. \end{aligned}$$

An easy computation shows that then also

$$\begin{aligned} a_1 z_2 + a_n z_n &= d_1 z_1, \\ a_2 z_3 + a_1 z_1 &= d_2 z_2, \\ &\cdots\cdots \\ a_n z_1 + a_{n-1} z_{n-1} &= d_n z_n. \end{aligned}$$

Hence the matrix $A - D$ where D is a diagonal matrix with diagonal elements $d_1, \ldots, d_n$ has rank smaller than $n - 1$. The proof is complete.

THEOREM 2.8. *Let $A \in C_n$. Then there exists a permutation matrix P such that PAP^T is tridiagonal irreducible.*

Proof. According to 2.6, no row of C_n contains more than two off-diagonal entries different from zero, by 2.7 and 2.3 some row contains exactly one such off-diagonal element. Choose this as the first row of the permuted matrix $B = (b_{ik})$ and as the element b_{12}. In the second row, $b_{21} = b_{12} \neq 0$. Let b_{23} be second nonzero element in this row, further $b_{34} \neq 0$ etc. This process can be performed completely since otherwise $B \in C_n$ would not be irreducible. Hence B is tridiagonal and the proof is complete.

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